

Circular economy: “systemic change” needed to address resource scarcity

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Binding waste-reduction targets, revamped ecodesign legislation and measures to break the link between growth and the use of natural resources are the chief demands set out in a resolution passed on Wednesday by environment MEPs, who call on the Commission to table new legislation by the end of 2015.

“It is a vital step for the EU to use resources more efficiently and to reduce our resource dependency and also to bring savings in material costs. Smart ecodesign of products also bears in mind repairing, reusing and recycling products,” said the lead MEP, [Sirpa Pietikäinen](#), after her resolution was adopted by the environment committee by 56 votes to 5, with 5 abstentions.

“As Europe is more dependent on imported resources than any other region in the world, moving towards a circular economy is an economic and ecological win-win scenario,” she added.

The resolution follows up the Commission communications on a circular economy package, tabled jointly with a legislative proposal on waste which was withdrawn a couple of months later.

Towards zero waste

The environment committee calls on the Commission to table a new proposal with the following points by the end of 2015:

- waste prevention measures;
- binding waste-reduction targets for municipal, commercial and industrial waste to be achieved by 2025;
- application of the “pay as you throw” principle;
- targets for recycling and preparation for reuse to be raised to at least 70% of municipal solid waste and 80% of packaging waste by 2030;
- incineration to be strictly limited by 2020 to non-recyclable and non-biodegradable waste;
- a binding, gradual reduction of all landfill waste.

Ecodesign

The MEPs call on the Commission to promote a life-cycle oriented approach towards product policy and ecodesign, with an ambitious work programme. They want a review of eco-design legislation by the end of 2016, broadening its scope and covering all product groups. They demand definitions of the requirements for criteria such as durability, repairability, reusability and recyclability. They also want the Commission to draw up measures to eliminate planned obsolescence.

Systemic change

To tackle the problem of scarce resources, the extraction and use of resources must be reduced and the link between growth and the use of natural resources must be severed. The committee says that in order to switch to the sustainable use of resources by 2050, EU policy must require:

Press release

- a reduction, in absolute terms, of resource consumption to sustainable levels;
- strict application of the waste hierarchy;
- implementation of a cascading use of resources;
- greater use of renewables,
- phasing-out of toxic substances;
- Improvements in the quality of ecosystem services.

The Commission should also propose indicators for resource efficiency, measuring resource consumption, including imports and exports, and their use should be mandatory from 2018, says the committee. It calls for a binding target to increase resource efficiency at EU level by 30% from 2014 levels, by 2030, as well as individual targets for each member state.

Background

The global economy uses the equivalent of one and a half planets' worth of resources to produce global output and absorb waste and estimates put this figure at two planets' worth of resources by the 2030s, say MEPs. Europe is more dependent on imported resources than any other region in the world and many resources will be exhausted in the relatively short term, they add.

MEPs stress that improving resource use could lead to substantial net savings for EU businesses, public authorities and consumers, estimated at EUR 600 billion, or 8% of annual turnover, while also reducing total annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2 to 4 %. They emphasise that a 30% increase in resource productivity by 2030 could boost GDP by nearly 1% and create 2 million additional sustainable jobs.

Next steps

The full House will vote on the report at the 6 to 9 July session, in Strasbourg.

Further information

- Meeting documents:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/organes/envi/envi_20150616_1500.htm
- Procedure file:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2014/2208%28INI%29&l=en>
- Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/envi/home.html>

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